

## A CIRCUS ROMANCE

By Elizabeth Schoen Cobb.

From a distance Marley, circus clown, worshiped the daring female equestrienne, Gloria. It was no wonder. She was unlike any dainty-toed, sylph-fashioned girl who had ever swayed trippingly across the platformed back of a trained ring steed. There was none of the simpering praise seeker in her smile or of flam-



"Now, Then, I Want Your Story!"

ing audacity in her pose. She was simply a lively, delighted girl, full of vivacity and loving the sawdust atmosphere because she had been brought up in it, her father having been a ringmaster for over a quarter of a century.

"A new clown, eh?" he remarked to the manager the day Marley appeared to succeed the one invalidated.

"Yes, and a good one," was the response. "He will have to learn the antics, but as to the face and voice, he is a genius."

So it proved. All the players knew

was that Marley had been an actor, then a teacher in a school of mimicry. Then the newcomer turned out to be a mystery. He acted strange and unsocial. One would almost guess he was striving to hide himself from somebody or something.

"He leaves the show and disappears, and you never see him on the street," said Mr. Rice one day to the manager.

"What matters, so he fills the bill and draws the crowd?" retorted the manager.

"Yes, he does that, all right," was conceded.

Then there happened something that awoke both gratitude and uneasiness in the old ringmaster. One night, just as Gloria was rounding the ring with tip-toe elegance, a gasoline chandelier fell across the head of the steed she rode.

The horse screamed, reared and backed. Gloria sprang lightly to the sawdust floor of the arena. A whirl of the scattering flames, however, had caught her light, gauzy dress.

A shriek of alarm rang from the audience at this vivid picture of impending destruction.

"She is doomed!"

"Save her—oh, quick!"

The ringmaster stood petrified with helpless dread. Others in the ring moved forward, but stupidly gazed, with no plan of aid or rescue. A quick figure suddenly flew past dressing-room curtains. It was Marley.

His face was white as death, his eyes glowed eager fire. He had torn down a drapery in his mad rush. How he did it, he himself could not tell afterwards, but in a flash he had enveloped that beloved form, extinguished the flames and Gloria, her hair barely singed, bowed and smiled to the audience, while Marley tottered back out of view, face and hands seared and blistered.

But the audience would not have it that way. They yelled and clapped their hands and shouted until the manager forced Marley into the ring.